

School Based Health Centers: Supporting Students' Well-Being and Access to Care

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Summary

School-based health centers (SBHCs) provide essential health services to hundreds of thousands of Michigan kids each year and are vital partners in the work to connect uninsured students to affordable health coverage.

Education

Health

School-Based Health Centers in Michigan



Michigan offers several models for delivering student health services, including Child and Adolescent Health Centers (CAHCs), School Wellness Programs, and "E3" (Expanding, Enhancing Emotional Health) sites. While school-based and school-linked health centers are distinct, both fall under the CAHC model. This brief will use "school-based health centers" (SBHCs) to refer to all models providing physical or behavioral health care in or near schools.

Michigan has more than 300 SBHCs.

These centers provide critical services such as:

- Routine screenings
- Vision and hearing assessments
- Mental health support.

Many operate year-round with extended hours, allowing students access to care even when schools are closed.⁵ SBHCs play a key role in advancing health equity by **reducing common barriers** like cost and transportation, particularly for students from families with low incomes and families in rural communities who often face greater challenges in obtaining regular, high-quality health care.

Health and Education are closely connected.

Research shows that when students are healthy, they learn better, and higher education levels lead to improved long-term health.^{1,2} Conversely, unmet health needs — especially unaddressed mental health challenges — often lead to chronic absenteeism, which significantly impacts students' academic performance.^{3,4}

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School-Based Health Centers and Medicaid

Medicaid is a public health insurance program jointly funded by state and federal governments. It provides health coverage to individuals and families who could not otherwise afford it. In Michigan, about one-third of children are covered by Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), making both essential to the provision of student health services.⁶

Medicaid and CHIP offer comprehensive coverage, including preventive care, screenings, and treatment for physical and mental health conditions. These programs also support students with disabilities by covering necessary staffing, services, and medical equipment required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).⁷ Such coverage ensures students with disabilities receive the support and accommodations they need to thrive in school. Taken together, it is evident that Medicaid supports Michigan students by fostering better school attendance, academic performance, and long-term economic outcomes compared to uninsured children.^{8,9}

NOTE: While the brief’s focus is on SBHCs, we acknowledge that some direct health services or Medicaid-reimbursable administrative services may also be provided outside of these settings by school-employed staff, such as school psychologists or paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities. Therefore, SBHCs and schools are referred to throughout.

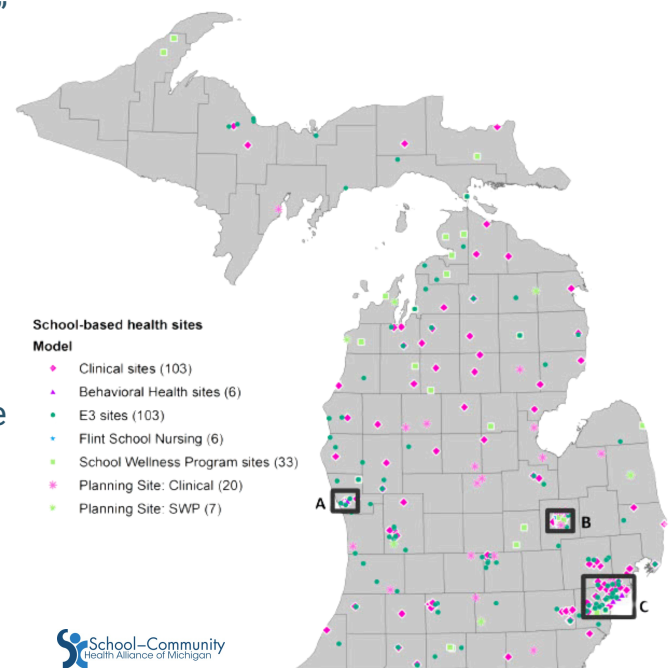
The Importance of Reconnecting Children with Coverage

The Impact of Medicaid Unwinding

Between 2023 and 2024, states were required to “unwind” the continuous coverage provision of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This provision allowed Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries to remain enrolled without having to complete the standard annual renewal process. As a result of the unwinding, Medicaid/CHIP enrollment in Michigan declined by over 770,000 – about 25% of enrollees – between June 2023 and July 2024.¹⁰ During the same period, more than **225,000 children** were disenrolled.¹¹

A majority of these disenrollments resulted from procedural issues, not verified ineligibility, causing many, including children, to lose coverage due to outdated contact info or missed renewal notices. Many remain eligible based on family income but may now be uninsured.

Map of Clinical Sites (2024)



The Role of Schools and SBHCs in Re-Enrolling Eligible Students

Fortunately, schools and SBHCs are trusted community resources uniquely positioned to assist families in re-enrolling eligible children in Medicaid or CHIP. By leveraging their ongoing relationships with students and parents, SBHCs can help connect uninsured children to affordable health coverage, thereby improving student well-being and securing vital funding to deliver essential health services.

Schools and SBHCs can receive Medicaid reimbursement for direct health services and

administrative activities like outreach and enrollment assistance. For example, SBHCs can bill Medicaid for services like speech therapy and for helping families complete a Medicaid and CHIP application. Reimbursement for such administrative activities is known as administrative claiming, and recent federal guidance from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is helping to streamline the process.¹²

CMS has also established a

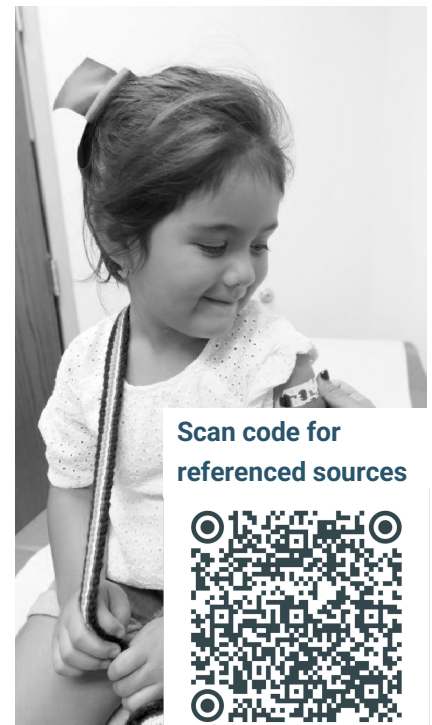
technical assistance center to support schools with Medicaid billing and administrative claiming. By utilizing these resources, schools and SBHCs will be better equipped to secure vital funding for outreach, enrollment, and student health services, ultimately enhancing students' access to affordable care and strengthening support for families. Protecting and expanding these opportunities is critical to ensuring every young person receives the services they need to succeed.

Threats to Medicaid Funding

The latest federal proposals seek to cut Medicaid funding by at least \$880 billion over the next decade – reductions that will have an enormous impact on our youth, who make up more than one-third of all individuals covered by Medicaid in Michigan.¹³

If adopted, these cuts will place additional strain on our state budget, school districts and SBHCs. Most SBHCs rely on a mix of state funding,

philanthropic support and Medicaid reimbursement to operate.¹⁴ If federal Medicaid funding is reduced, states may be forced to scale back or reduce provider payments for critical youth health services, including developmental screenings, immunizations, and mental health care. Protecting and strengthening Medicaid is central to keeping young people in our state healthy, engaged in school, and well-positioned for future success.



Recommendations or Strengthening Medicaid Access

With Medicaid, Michigan students can stay healthy, focused and ready to learn. The following are ways to strengthen access to this vital program:

Support SBHCs in Medicaid Outreach and Reimbursement

Schools and SBHCs can receive Medicaid reimbursement for direct health services provided to eligible students as well as administrative activities, including outreach and application assistance. Ensuring that schools and SBHC staff are well-trained in Medicaid administrative claiming will help schools maximize available funding and maintain robust student health services.

Streamline MEDicaid/CHIP Enrollment and Renewals

Michigan should continue to leverage federal flexibilities and training opportunities that simplify enrollment. Like many other states, Michigan uses "ex parte" renewals, which automatically verify eligibility using third-party data. During the Medicaid unwinding process, 57% of Michigan enrollees were renewed automatically.¹⁵ Expanding this practice may reduce the number of uninsured children in Michigan while easing the administrative burden on families and SBHCs by minimizing the need to reassess coverage options and resubmit paperwork.

Adopt Express Lane Eligibility (ELE)

Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) allows states to use eligibility data from other income-based programs – such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Head Start, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) – to automatically enroll or renew children in Medicaid.¹⁶ Like ex parte renewals, ELE streamlines the process and reduces the risk of eligible children losing coverage. By implementing these strategies, Michigan can improve Medicaid and CHIP enrollment and retention and, ultimately, kids' access to care across our state.

Conclusion

Medicaid plays a vital role in supporting schools and SBHCs and ensuring children across Michigan have access to the health care they need. Protecting and strengthening Medicaid is crucial to maintaining student well-being, academic success and long-term health.